

Dictatorship and Democracy in the Soviet Union

**by
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DICTATORSHIP AND DEMOCRACY IN THE SOVIET UNION

BY ANNA LOUISE STRONG

REVISITING America after a three years' absence, and lecturing on my twelve years in the Soviet Union, I was struck by a significant increase in would-be intelligent questions about dictatorship in government. "How can three million Communists rule one hundred and sixty million people?" is the simplest form the question takes. It may be accompanied by envious wonder at Communist cleverness, or by a sophisticated fling at Stalin—"just another Hitler!" It may show the superiority of the intellectual climber, aware that dictatorships are the mode today. Oftenest it implies some aloofness of America, not to be caught in the nets of Europe. "Those backward Russians, those quarrelsome Europeans may need dictatorships; but *we* will make *our* changes democratically."

"Dictatorship versus democracy" is a universal subject of lectures, debates, editorials, magazine articles in the United States. It has even become a question of practical politics, and Americans are discussing politics as they have not done for years. The rise of Hitler, the growth of other fascist dictatorships, full-fledged or implicit, the appearance of a strong-man policy in Washington, loyally cheered by those folk who most use the democratic slogan—all this has brought the problem to the fore. The usual lecture on this theme puts on the one side Stalin, Hitler, Mussolini—all dictators, to be contrasted with democracy actual or hoped for. It seeks to raise the flattering antithesis of "dictatorship" with "democracy" to avoid the truer and more annoying contrast of the Soviet Union with the capitalist world.

When I hear these lectures and debates on dictatorship and democracy, I sense deep misunderstanding of the facts. For though the U.S.S.R. is by definition a dictatorship, it is not what these lecturers imply by the term. It is marked by far wider participation of masses in the daily tasks of governing, by a far more flexible inclusion of millions of individual wills than either the parliamentary forms derived from last century or the more mediæval rule to which Hitler makes return.

I think of millions of ordinary folk giving time to the job of governing, on housing commissions, taxing commissions, social insurance commissions, investigating commissions. "Planning" starts on winter evenings in the snow-bound rural village, or after working hours in sessions of foundry hands and forge men. I think of the hundreds of new ideas in government that begin in a Ukrainian township or a Ural steel mill or a Central Asia cotton gin, and that sweep the country through mass acceptance to universal adoption. I remember hundreds of men and women in government office, factory manager, inspector or judge, rising steadily from the masses through years of the voluntary government work in which millions take part, and always keeping touch with some farm or factory through which they interpret and lead the will of the mass. I think of the proud words of a small official in Molvitino township: "Why should we ask Kostroma (capital of the province)? Haven't we a Soviet Power of our own?"—and the testimony they bear to local initiative and rule.

I shall therefore content myself with concrete reporting on items of daily life in the Soviet Union, which show how our life here is governed. To know such facts is of vital importance in judging methods of government today.

The Drive on the Kulaks

Let us seize the sharpest horns of the bull at once: that exiling in recent years of perhaps a million kulaks (the better-to-do peasants who exploited hired labor) from their rural homes in European Russia and Ukraine to Siberia and the northern woods. Here is an action which caused in America wide comment. What was the process? How was it carried on?

The usual assumption outside the Soviet Union is that this exiling occurred through drastic action by a mystically omnipotent G.P.U. The actual process was quite different; it was done by village meetings of poor peasants and farmhands which listed those kulaks who "impede the collective farm by force and violence" and asked the government to deport them. In the hot days of 1930 I attended several of these meetings. They were harsh, ruthless discussions, analyzing one by one the "best families," which had grabbed the best lands, exploited labor by owning the tools of production, as

“best families” normally and historically do, and who were now fighting the rise of the collective farms by arson, cattle-killing and murder. Meetings of poor peasants and farmhands discussed them, questioned them, passed on them, allowing some to remain but listing others as “dangerous to our peaceful development—should be deported from our village.”

It was a harsh, bitter and by no means bloodless conflict. I was reminded of it again in the San Joaquin Valley of California by the cotton pickers’ strike in autumn of 1933. The same gradations from half-starved farmhand to wealthy rancher, though the extremes in California were wider. California local authorities permitted deportation of pickets who interfered with farming of private ranchers; Soviet authorities permitted deportation of kulaks who interfered with the collectively owned farms of poor peasants and laborers. In both cases the central government sent investigating commissions, slightly moderating and therewith sanctioning the local actions. The governor’s commission in California threw out a few of the most untenable cases against strikers. In the U.S.S.R. the township and provincial commissions reviewed the lists of “kulaks for exile” and greatly cut them down, guarding against local spites and excesses. But the active winning will which could count on the backing of government was in California the will of ranchers and finance corporations; in the U.S.S.R. the will of organized farmhands. That, in its simplest essence, is “proletarian dictatorship.”

Power in the Hands of Workers

Certain fundamental matters in the Soviet Union are held to have been settled by the Revolution and incorporated in the constitution of the country; on them no debate either tends to arise or would be permitted. The power is in the hands of all who work and only these have voice in government. They use this power to operate the means of production for joint benefits. The most active participants in power are therefore those workers who are organized around the modern complex tools of production, the big industrial establishments and the large-scale mechanized farms. Such organized workers, steadily holding power, will train new generations who will co-operate freely through economic and social forms to achieve by

science the advancing conquest of nature. This is the theory assumed behind all life in the Soviet Union.

But if no debate regarding this general path of development takes place save as it is elaborated by philosophers and theoreticians, there is no lack of vital problems in daily government. Joseph Stalin brought out this point in his interview with the First American Labor Delegation, September 9, 1927. In answering a question he declared: "You speak of a conflict of opinion among the workers and peasants at the present time, under the proletarian dictatorship. I have said already that conflict of opinion exists and will exist in the future, that no progress is possible without this, but conflict of opinion among the workers under present conditions centers, not around the question of the overthrow of the Soviet system in principle, but around practical questions like the improvement of the Soviets, the rectification of errors committed by the Soviet organs and, consequently, of consolidating Soviet rule." (*Interview With Foreign Workers' Delegations*, by Joseph Stalin, International Publishers.)

Under what form shall social ownership be manifested, municipal, federal, or voluntary cooperative? Which industries are better handled by state-appointed managers? Which by small groups of workers selecting their own management? What relation shall exist between various forms of socially owned production, between city and rural districts? What relative attention shall be given to each of a thousand factories, trades, localities? Over this daily stuff of government, discussion and struggle goes on—and change and experiment.

Month by month in the past 12 years I have seen campaigns and continuous efforts to "draw wide popular masses" into these governing tasks. "Every kitchen maid must learn to rule the state"; this slogan of Lenin served as a clarion call to millions of suppressed, illiterate women in the decade gone by. If "eternal vigilance is the price of liberty," and vigilance relaxed is a source of "democracy's" woes, then eternal participating activity is the price of a socialist order, and it is a harder task. Factory hands, housewives, longshoremen, farm laborers, office workers, the great working masses—had to be stirred, prodded, energized into active part in rule. They are taking such part—and widely; all our troubles arise when they slacken.

Government Begins at the Work Bench

The first and most essential governing tasks in the U.S.S.R. start at the workers' bench. Here took form the Five Year Plan that startled the world. Production meetings after work discuss shop problems, what holds back production, how much it can be increased, granted certain raw materials, machines and skilled personnel, for the coming year. These discussions are enlarged on a factory scale; they go up from factory to the central offices of the trust. Word comes down to the shop again that the country needs certain new machines. Can we make them in our plant? And here workers' invention and suggestion widen to include a nation's plans. Delegates from other industries which need the machines arrive, explain, mutually consult.

For a socialist state this is the simplest, most basic act of government; workers planning expansion and improvement of their publicly owned properties. The biggest basic plants, supplying equipment on which the rest of the land depends—steel works, auto works, locomotive works, mines—become naturally known as "political centers." I can pick them out in Moscow: Electric Works, Auto Works, Ball-Bearing Works, Aviation Works, and others. From these centers arise new ideas, new policies for the nation's growth; before any new policy is seriously considered, wide sampling takes place of workers' opinion in these centers. When any policy is put through, the active force for carrying it into being consists of the workers in such centers and other workers organized around them.

Political life in rural districts starts around the use of the land. Sixty peasants in council—the collective farm of a small village—meet with the representative of the township land department or the farm expert from the tractor station to draw up their "farm plan." Number of households, of people, of horses, ploughs, tractors, extent and type of land must be included. The plan must take account of the little community's food and fodder needs, the past crop rotations, the marketable crop recommended by the state for their locality. Certain general directions come down from the central Commissariat of Agriculture, filtered through the provincial land offices and adapted to their region: a two percent increase in grain or a rise in industrial crops is asked for. The sixty peasants in

council consider by what concrete means they will expand or rearrange their fields for all these purposes; discussion after discussion takes place all winter through till the "plan" is accomplished. Consciously they are settling problems of government on which country-wide, province-wide, nation-wide plans will be based.

From this simple economic base all other tasks of government begin. In every task, planning, execution, checking, these masses take part. Taxing and housing commissions, social insurance commissions, sanitary commissions, complaint commissions—are carried on by unpaid labor millions, served by secretarial work of a smaller number of full-time officials. Driving along a country road fifty miles from a railway I see four women on a shady bench poring over a ledger—a rural tax commission revaluing village property for report to the village assembly. A few miles further is a district court, holding travelling session under the trees; it has drawn two local peasants in to serve as co-judges. Moscow decrees a passport system for its citizens and opens scores of offices for listing, investigating, checking; the work is largely done by teachers, office workers, factory workers, women on old age pensions emerging to do their bit in government. They call it "doing social work"; every worker and office employee is urged to do it; every factory prides itself by the number of its workers who take voluntary part in government.

Foreign Workers Participate

Even foreigners residing in the Soviet Union are asked to take part in government. When there were three hundred Americans employed in the Stalingrad Tractor Works, the urging of the Russians finally induced them to elect two of their number to sit on the Stalingrad City Soviet. "Some one must be there to explain your situation and needs and the American ideas about the Tractor Plant," ran the argument. All minority groups of workers are similarly urged, that every shade of desire and knowledge may be combined in the "public will." "Majority rule" is far too crude a form of government for running the intricacies of modern industry; majorities and also all significant minorities must be included; discussion and analysis must then take place till unanimity is reached.

Last autumn the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party declared a special drive of housing investigation, that workers' hous-

ing might be in order before winter should set in. Investigating brigades were organized around every large shop and factory, *i.e.*, every "political center." The task of these brigades was to inspect and report on conditions in their assigned blocks or apartment houses. The "Foreign Workers Brigade" of the Stalin Auto Workers, consisting of Americans and Germans employed in the automobile industry, won for itself brief prominence for its excellent work in housing investigation and especially for carrying the fight through various municipal offices till certain abuses were righted. Nobody objected to the foreigners' intrusion; all Russians with whom they came in contact were pleased and excited that "foreigners also take part in our social work"; they gave them, in fact, quite special attention. These men were engaged in factory work during the day, and the abuses noted were not in their own apartments; but they, with thousands of workers like them, gave evening work to housing inspection which resulted not only in immediate correction of certain abuses but in certain changes in municipal instructions on housing.

This is the normal way in which changes of law and new regulations are made in the Soviet Union, through investigations made by large organized masses of energetic citizens, from which conditions become evident and new ideas emerge. This is also the process whereby yesterday's backward farmhands and factory workers become today's participants in voluntary government commissions and graduate perhaps as tomorrow's full time judges, county officials and commissars. Practically all of the new government officials are drawn from men and women who have served considerable apprenticeship in unpaid government or social work.

Full Time Work and "Social Work"

* It is of course not unusual for workers in other countries to rise by diligence and the votes of their fellows to minor political jobs. The difference lies in the intimate relation they still sustain in the U.S.S.R. to the masses from which they rose. There is no hard and fast line between full time officials and the millions who give varying amount of voluntary "social work." A worker-citizen may divide his time in a score of different ways. A textile worker, showing ability in the voluntary work of supervising the factory day nursery, may rise to part-time post as assistant chief of Motherhood and

Infancy in the City Health Department without thereby ceasing her work at the loom. A man whose financial ability is practised as volunteer dues collector for his trade union may acquire a half-time paid job as assistant chief of the city tax department, while still continuing his regular day-time job. If the secondary job becomes the first and the worker leaves his bench for permanent work as city official, there is no change in social status. There may not even be a change in salary, for city officials' wages may be either above or below that of a skilled worker. Usually there will be no sharp withdrawal from his factory. He who once did government work in spare time will now return to the factory for "social work" in its night school or young folks' organizations. This doubling of factory work with government posts is not caused merely by shortage of skilled personnel. It is a conscious policy of keeping close connection between workers and government. If workers who take no part in governing are rated lazy and backward, government officials who do no work in factory or farm organizations are considered "alien from the masses." These are the every day relations of "proletarian dictatorship."

As a result of this wide diffusion of government activity among the masses, initiative in government is very decentralized. The hundreds of new ideas and methods that are yearly adopted start locally from the experience of a million men. So started the "socialist competitions" from the "subbotniks" (volunteer social work on holidays); so they developed into many forms of mutual stimulation of labor, some of them first arising in mining districts, some in factories. So began, in the autumn of 1933 in North Caucasus, the plan for organizing the old men of the rural districts, who had been somewhat disconsolately crowded to the rear by youthful organizers of farm collectives, as "inspectors of quality" for the joint-owned farm. It was a brilliant local idea which will doubtless spread to other regions, since it gives these older men a task not only honorably fitted to their experience, but one which the Second Five Year Plan declares is of the highest importance to the nation.

Last spring in visiting Ivanovo district, a night's ride northeast of Moscow, I learned of an "international congress on farm methods" which had taken place the previous year on the initiative of the farmers of this province, hardly noticed in the Moscow press. Yet

delegates from France, Germany and China had attended, and had left behind them gorgeously embroidered banners to be used as prizes for farming records within this single province. The number of such acts of local initiative is endless; the central Moscow newspapers, especially *Izvestia* and *Pravda*, have scores of reporters travelling the country just to collect them and publish them, that good ideas and methods may spread from district to district, often leaping two thousand miles through the agency of the newspaper, and sometimes, if they meet wide response, becoming "all-union" methods.

Function of the Party

If all this widely scattered and varied initiative of the masses is not to be dissipated in conflicting endeavors but to carry the whole economic and social life of the country forward in the desired direction fixed by the October Revolution—there must be a central core of continuously acting people to stimulate, correlate and guide. This is the function of the Communist Party, to organize and lead the masses. It is not an antagonistic group set over against the masses, "three million people ruling a recalcitrant hundred and sixty million," as is often pictured abroad. It is rather the most energetic part of that hundred and sixty million, the ones who pledge their time to the public tasks of creating a new social and economic system, and who make this the continuing and dominant effort of their lives.

A member of the Communist Party becomes such not only through his own selection, but by the approval of the working class among whom he lives and toils. Not only must he come with recommendations from older Party members of from five to ten years standing, recommendations taken so seriously that a member may be expelled for endorsing an unworthy candidate. Not only must he undergo a period of probation ranging from one to two years, but admission may be refused, or a member once admitted may be expelled not only by the judgment of other Communists, but in response to accusations from non-party workers as well. The list of offenses for which expulsion is possible include not merely "alien elements, double-dealers, breakers of discipline, moral degenerates, careerists, self-seekers," but even "passive elements who do not carry out their duties and who have not mastered the program, rules and most important decisions of the party."

Members of the party are expected to be leaders, interpreting and leading the will of the working masses. That the party has plenty of "yes-men" and careerists is merely saying that it is an organization composed of human beings. Steady, consistent efforts are made to improve the quality of membership and to weed out through the periodical "cleansings" the unfit material. It is the common requirement made of all applicants for membership in the Communist Party who may be engaged in intellectual or office work, that they spend a year or two in "social work" in some large factory, before even making their application for membership, and are judged by the workers' view of their capacity to lead. A member who ceases to interpret and lead the workers around him, or who has merely become passive in this task, may be disciplined up to the point of rejection from the party. And this may happen not only to individual members, but to whole "city committees" if a situation develops which shows that they have failed to interpret and lead the masses.

Members of the party have their regular jobs by which they earn their living; they may be machine hands or People's Commissars. But their unpaid job as party members takes precedence of every other work, and of all family relations. At the very least they must expect to give several evenings a week to routine "party work," in some of the multitudinous, unexciting tasks of organizing masses in industry and government. This may be some dull job like collecting trade union dues, assembling material for a wall newspaper, checking up subscriptions to government loans; it may also include leading groups of youth or teaching classes in politics. Besides this routine "party work" a Communist is ever on call for mobilization to some distant province far from home and friends. In any new factory, if Communists are lacking, some will be sent there; some machine hands, engineers and office workers will be ordered to leave old established jobs for this frontier outpost that there may be a group of Communists there to lead the workers in the direction fixed by the "party line."

Creating the Collective Will

For it is not enough to interpret the will of the masses, as a ballot might or a showing of hands. It is not enough to analyze what the "majority want" and give it to them. It is the Communist's job to

lead, to create collective will. Certainly no group of unurged soldiers would ever vote to storm a trench; and certainly the workers and peasants of the Soviet Union would not have voted unurged, unled, for the hardships of these past five years of rapid industrialization taken out of their own food and comforts, for the painful speed of collectivization without adequate machines or organizers. But when the Communist Party analyzed, urged and demanded, showing the world situation and the need of making the Soviet Union well prepared industrially and for defense, showing the enemy classes who must be abolished, showing the goal of a socialist state and the hard road to its achievement, they were able to find, organize and create, deep in the heart of the masses, a will that carried through.

Let me take a simple example of Communist leadership, from a rural district some five hundred miles northeast of Moscow, which I chanced to visit in the sowing season of 1933. Molvitino township (if one may thus roughly translate the administrative unit called "rayon" which was in this case some forty miles square) lies fifty miles from the railroad. In prewar days its largely illiterate peasants lived by insufficient farming in a swampy, hilly region, supplemented by sweatshop cap-making. "Their agriculture has broken down; the cap-makers are mostly tubercular," wrote Lenin of Molvitino in his *Development of Capitalism in Russia* at the end of the last century.

Last year, for the first time in two generations, Molvitino produced adequate bread to feed its people. It produced in addition an export crop of flax. For a year and a half it has held the banner in Ivanovo province as "first in sowing and harvest." Of its 55,000 population, nearly one-third were going to school last winter; besides the 7,500 children, there were 5,000 adult peasants taking courses in various aspects of modern farming (crop rotation, farm accounting, brigade organization, tractor driving), 1,500 taking social and political courses preparatory to greater participation in government, and 2,000 more in study circles for reading and discussion without a teacher, since there were not enough teachers available.

The stimulation, organizing and disciplining of all this energetic endeavor, centers in the Communist Party of the township. There were in all 317 Communists and 450 Young Communists in the population of 55,000, widely scattered through more than a hundred hamlets. Krotov, township secretary of the Party, was a living

dynamo correlating all activities. Though he had no government post and no one was legally held to obey his orders, yet he would be held ultimately responsible by the Party for the entire progress of Molvitino township. As servant of all and leader of all, he must organize motive power and direction for the complex machine of government institutions and also for trade unions, cooperatives, study courses, peasant collective farms.

The Communists of Molvitino

During the sowing season Krotov's work began at six in the morning, and ended at midnight. His office was clearing house for every problem. The training of unskilled tractor drivers, the organization of twenty-seven summer courses in Marxism, the assignment of one hundred trade union members to their posts in "volunteer Sunday work" to help in sowing, the reports on seed shortage on increased flax area in four villages—were questions I saw pass his desk in a single hour. Constantly working with Krotov were the four other most important men in the township: the chairman of the executive committee (*i.e.*, head of local government), the head of the control commission (an inspecting, efficiency body surveying the work of Communists), the director of the tractor station (whose dozen tractors were the only mechanized industry in the township) and the head of political work for the tractor station (who organized party work on the farms serviced by tractors). Lesser lights were the director of the township branch of the State Bank, the superintendent of schools, the chief of the land office, the secretary of the small trade union of office workers.

Every one of these men had, besides their full time job, an extra job of "party work" in helping the sowing. At two o'clock one morning I went with the township banker to his assignment at a small collective farm of twenty families. We trudged for three miles over ravines and swamps and reached the still sleeping village as dawn was graying. The banker checked up their records, made suggestions on their book-keeping, noted the joyful fact that "sowing will finish today noon," discussed with them minor problems of organization, gave them the news of yesterday's record in the township and was back at home by six a.m. He had two hours' rest before his bank opened from nine to four, and was back again on

"party work" for the evening, checking up a different farm, of which he had several on his circuit.

The 317 Communists and 450 Young Communists all had similar farm assignments during the sowing. Many of them were detached from their jobs for three weeks and sent to the farms as check-men, book-keepers, repair men, supplementing the peasant labor by their central connections and the knowledge of organization. Men like the banker, who could not be spared from their regular jobs, had morning and evening assignments. Even Communist mothers of small babies had assignments, to nearer farms. Their party task was to agitate, energize, organize the peasants of Molvitino to fight for good records in sowing; they carried news of the latest methods of farming, the latest decrees on taxes. They were supplemented by a few hundred non-party teachers and trade union members who also volunteered under Krotov's urging. They were also helped by several hundred "peasant journalists" who posted up local "wall newspapers" and put through the sowing drive by energetic publicity on how everyone else was doing it.

Krotov told me his method for winning the banner. "First," he said, "was the sending of many of our best Communists out of the township posts into field work, and the keeping up of the quality of party members in the farms; we see to it that every Communist is known by his works; if he isn't, we clean him out quickly.

"That's the real secret; the mass believes us, believes us without limit! Look what we did with the early sowing and the extra-early! Straight against century-old tradition we went. We said: plant three weeks earlier than before; plant on the mud of melting snow. And the masses, worried, wavering, believed us and planted. Already they see the shoots. . . . The second help was our organization plan, keeping day and night in touch with every collective farm during the period of sowing."

In scores of Soviet townships I have seen Krotov's type of work repeated. The work of party secretary in a big industrial plant is similar, organizing and stimulating the workers to production, self-education, participation in government activities, thus giving the motive power which helps the factory carry out its "plan." And the "Plan" itself, where does that come from? Not from the party secretary and not alone from the plant's own workers, and certainly

not from Stalin, but from all of them together, endlessly interacting from center out to the furthest periphery in a flexible net-work. The five or ten "responsible workers" of Molvitino go often as delegates to the provincial capital, Ivanovo, where the Provincial Party Secretariat serves as clearing house for fifty-five townships and fifty-five Krotovs. The less responsible people go less often. Yet any peasant, toiling in distant fields, not even a party member, may, if he does some job with unusual speed or skill, find himself sent to some Congress of Farm Champions (udarniki) on a provincial scale or as far up as Moscow, to discuss new ways of improving the nation's farms.

"Power" and "Authority"

And in Moscow decisions based upon all these concentrated reports are made and travel outward to be discussed and adapted to provincial conditions, and to be again discussed and adapted to localities. The ultimate destination towards which the Soviet ship of state is steering was fixed by the Revolution; the rate of speed and the daily or yearly course is charted by the Central Committee of the Communist Party to take advantage of varying winds and tides. Yet it is a course which every active worker and peasant takes part in fixing. It arises from the experiences of three million Party members, each of them keeping in touch with some section of the masses, all of them interacting, discussing, comparing results. Communists of longest experience and best records have widest range and "authority"; but be it noted, they do not call it "power." "Power" resides in decisions of the working masses; "authority" is that prestige of character and knowledge which enables its possessor to make and interpret these decisions.

It is "authority" rather than "power" that Stalin himself possesses. Though his standing is far higher than that of any other man in the Soviet Union, though he is cheered and quoted at all congresses, whether of governmental delegates, trade unions or farms, yet no one inquires what is Stalin's purpose or Stalin's will. They inquire what is Stalin's analysis of the situation, his summing up of problems and most important steps. I was struck at once by the contrast when I left the Soviet Union and visited Berlin and Washington. In Berlin I saw motion picture films bearing inscriptions: "Approved by Herr

Von ———, leader of our youth,” and was startled. No individual “approves” a film or book or drama in the U.S.S.R. In Washington I heard men say: “We do not yet know what the President will decide. No one is yet quite certain of his intentions.” Men do not speak thus in the U.S.S.R. of Stalin.

Let me give a brief example of how Stalin functions. I saw him preside at a small committee meeting, deciding a matter on which I had brought a complaint. He summoned to his office all the persons concerned in the matter, but when we arrived we found ourselves meeting not only with Stalin, but also with Voroshiloff and Kaganovich. Stalin sat down, not at the head of the table, but informally placed where he could see the faces of all. He opened the talk with a plain, direct question, repeating the complaint in one sentence and asking the man complained against: “Why was it necessary to do this?”

After this he said less than anyone. An occasional phrase, a word without pressure; even his questions were less demands for answers than interjections guiding the speakers’ thought. But how swiftly everything was revealed, all our hopes, egotisms, conflicts, all the things we had been doing to each other. The essential nature of men I had known for years and of others I met for the first time came out sharply, more clearly than I had ever seen them, yet without prejudice. Each of them had to cooperate, to be taken account of in a problem; the job we must do and its direction became clear.

I was hardly conscious of the part played by Stalin in helping us reach a decision; I thought of him rather as someone superlatively easy to explain things to, who got one’s meaning half through a sentence and brought it all out very quickly. When everything became clear and not a moment sooner or later, Stalin turned to the others: “Well?” A word from one, a phrase from another, together accomplished a sentence. Nods—it was unanimous. It seemed we had all decided, simultaneously, unanimously.

Stalin’s Method

That is Stalin’s method and greatness. He is supreme analyst of situations, personalities, tendencies. Through his analysis he is supreme combiner of many wills. A creator of collective will—such is supposed to be every Communist, though by no means all of them

measure to this high calling. The greatness of the man is known by the range over which he can do this. "I can analyze and plan with the workers of one plant for a period of several months," said a responsible Communist to me. "Others, much wiser than I, like men on our Central Committee, can plan with wider masses for years. Stalin is in this our ablest. He sees the interrelation of our path with world events, and the order of each step, as a man sees the earth from the stratosphere. But the men of our Central Committee take his analysis not because it is Stalin's but because it is clear and convincing and documented with facts."

When Stalin reports to a congress of the party,* or of the farm champions, or the heads of industry, none of his statements can be ranked as new. They are statements heard already on the lips of millions throughout the land. But he puts them together more completely than anyone else. He analyzes them, shows the beginning, the end and all the stages to that end. He shows the farm champions the long, hard path to collective farming and just where they are on that path today. He shows the heads of industry what and why are the fundamental tasks in industry at the moment. He shows the party congress the chief tasks for the Soviet Union in the next few years. All of this he shows out of their own reports and knowledge, combining and relating these to the situation in the country and the world. It is not the statements or the policies that are new but the combining of them, so that they become a collective program, unanimously and understandingly adopted. It is for this capacity that men cheer Stalin.

Men never speak in the Soviet Union of "Stalin's policy" but always of the "party line," which Stalin "reports" in its present aspects, but does not "make." The party line is accessible to all to study, to know and to help formulate within the limits set by the Revolution's goal. There have indeed been statements by Stalin which have ushered in new epochs, as when he told a conference of Agrarian Marxists that the time had come to "liquidate the kulaks as a class." Yet he announced merely the time for a process which every Communist knew was eventually on the program.

The famous article by Stalin entitled "Dizziness from Success,"

* Read his report to the 17th Congress of the Communist Party, International Publishers, 1934.

which appeared in the *Pravda*, March 2, 1930, two months after the address to the Agrarian Marxists, and which called a sudden halt to the widespread excesses of Communist action in rural districts, was regarded by foreign correspondents and wide masses of peasants alike as an "order by Stalin." Stalin himself immediately disclaimed any personal prestige therefrom accruing, stating publicly in the press: "Some people believe that the article is the result of the personal initiative of Stalin. That is nonsense, of course. The Central Committee does not exist in order to permit the personal initiative of anybody in matters of this kind. It was a reconnaissance undertaken by the Central Committee." There is no need to assume, as many foreigners did, that this was a disingenuous disclaimer of personal rule. It was a very exact statement of fact.

Stalin concluded his article on "Dizziness from Success" * with the following words: "The art of leadership is a serious matter. One must not lag behind a movement, because to do so is to become isolated from the masses. But one must not rush ahead, for this is to lose contact with the masses. . . . Our Party is strong and invincible because, while leading the movement, it knows how to maintain and multiply its contacts with the millions of the workers and peasant masses." This may be taken as Stalin's analysis of "leadership."

Not by accident does Stalin guide from the post of "General Secretary of the Communist Party" rather than from any governmental office. For the work of the Communist Party is wider than and greater than that of government; to run the state is but one of its many tasks. Part of its members, surrounded by much larger numbers of loyal "non-party" people, are spared for the work of the state. Others, similarly aided by non-party sympathizers, run the great trade unions with their 18 million members. Others guide the collective farms, which are economic organizations of peasants, in no sense governmental. Other party members correlate the work of nation-wide cooperatives, bringing them into harmony with the rest of the plan; organize the "Friends of Children," the "Down with Illiteracy Society," the "Auto and Good Roads Club" or the score of voluntary organizations which are non-governmental.

* See J. V. Stalin, *Leninism*, Vol. II, p. 280.

A Party Mobilization

As one last example of the interrelation of party, government and voluntary social forces, let me take the "mobilization" of automobiles and mechanics in the spring of 1931 to save flax-sowing in Moscow Province, in which even I, a woman, a foreigner, and not a party member, was called on to take part. Collective farming came that year to our province in a great drive of propaganda and organization backed by hundreds of new tractors, rented out to the collective farms through dozens of newly formed "tractor stations." It was "plan" that year to increase flax area in our province, using the new tractors first for those farms that extended the sowing of flax. But in the first week of sowing, word came to Moscow that there was a "break." Tractors all over the province stood in the fields, not moving, for complex causes yet to be analyzed.

Who moves in such a case? The Moscow Committee of the Communist Party acts. Sorting over in its offices the reports of all Moscow's daily emergencies, it decides that the break in flax sowing is most serious of all. It declares a "mobilization" of mechanics.

Not a single mechanic in all Moscow is compelled to answer; that's not what mobilization means. Mobilization means that shop committees in a hundred centers announce and promote the idea; that mechanics willing to give some time in the sowing are helped by their foremen and fellow workers to arrange their jobs, and go forth on this sanctioned public task without forfeiting wages, while others make up the gap at home. What is the motive? The fun of participating in saving the sowing, in running the country, the pleasure of living a vivid, useful, varied life.

Automobiles are also "mobilized" to carry the mechanics to the farms. Since I have time, I decide to respond to the call. Our autos, five in number, loaded with sixteen mechanics, draw up in the afternoon at the Volokolamsk Tractor Station, one hundred and fifty miles north of Moscow, to which we are assigned. Quickly, in conference with the chief mechanic, we learn the condition of his tractors, in general and in detail. "That April lot from Putiloff," he swears. "Thirty-three we got, all new ones; rotten! Eleven of them can't move on their own power from the railway station."

The "April lot" of Putiloff tractors were made in a competition

with Stalingrad. Putiloff won on quantity; the nearby tractor stations of Moscow Province received the product. Already the Putiloff April tractors were damned as a crime. Not only were they holding back sowing; they created what we call in the U.S.S.R. a "political situation," injuring the faith between city workers and peasants, injuring therefore the essence of government. Such was the difficulty we were called to help.

Dividing the farms among our five automobiles we scattered, each to our own job. At early twilight I drove my load of three machinists to a little farm of fifty families, working their soil in common with three tractors. Here we learned a second cause for the "break" in the sowing. The tractor drivers, six on two shifts, were peasant boys and girls who had seen their first machine one month before. When they heard a queer sound from the machine they stopped, afraid of breaking it, and waited for the mechanic. Hundreds of tractors all over Moscow Province waiting for mechanics. And only a few dozen mechanics. This was the reason for our mobilization.

All night, while I slept in the teacher's room, the mechanic volunteers repaired tractors. And all night the six local tractor drivers stood up to watch the job; such was their eagerness to learn. When at four in the morning they called me to drive to the next farm, the local boys and girls, drivers of tractors, kept right on work, driving out to the fields.

Our second farm was a different sort, a backward lot. Neither bread nor tea they offered our weary mechanics, arriving two hours past dawn. They swore at us instead; city workers were we, those city workers who deceive the farms with tractors. Take them, look at them, we don't want them.

Our city mechanics took them, looked at them, repaired them and put them to work in the fields. The attitude of the peasants grudgingly changed. The younger ones came and thanked us.

At four in the afternoon the five autos gathered again at the tractor station to write a formal statement which the Russians call an "Act." It gave in technical terms the exact fault in every tractor and generalized from those faults. From the hard-won fields of Volokolamsk we put our fingers into the distant Putiloff Plant in Leningrad and pointed out which shops were guilty. Certain iron castings regularly went to powder; a certain little gadget that a

clever engineer had substituted for ball bearings wasn't doing the work. It was clear, specific indictment, not of the Putiloff tractor but of certain specified parts. All the mechanics signed it.

Through gathering dusk I drove my car to Moscow, five hours with sleeping mechanics in the seats. They had worked twenty hours on end and were entitled to rest. Next morning they would be back on their factory job, reporting to interested fellows on the Moscow flax sowing and the crimes of Putiloff. The "Act" they had written went next day to the *Industrial Gazette*, newspaper of heavy industry, chief monitor of Putiloff.

Printed on the authority of a dozen mechanics, the indictment called the attention of the prosecuting attorney, who asked the automobile organization to keep on gathering data. It led to a summons sent to the chief of production at Putiloff, and a hearing held in the Commissariat of Heavy Industry attended by a dozen organizations interested in tractors. The affidavit made by our weary mechanics had been in truth an "Act," with direct results in the tractor industry. And when spring passed into summer, the flax of Moscow Province, which in early season had threatened to lag at 50 per cent of plan, went over the top to 108 per cent, the best record in the Soviet Union. "It was the work of the social organizations that saved us," said the Moscow Tractor Center.

The Active Will of the Workers

That's how we did it. Where was the state in all this? The state owned the Putiloff Works which made a fair tractor with certain serious but repairable flaws. The state financed the tractor stations which trained young drivers and sent out machines, some of which failed. The state owned, through its Commissariat of Heavy Industry, the *Industrial Gazette*, which exposed the defects. But the driving will that saved the situation was the will of thousands of Moscow workers organized and assigned their tasks by the Moscow Committee of the Communist Party, of which most of the mechanics were not even members.

We active worker-citizens were quite consciously saving the sowing, repairing the threatened breach between city and farm, fixing up gaps in the Putiloff Tractor Works, getting new tractor stations organized to work. We were handling essential details of govern-

ment. When it was done, we turned it over to the state. Since 1931 the flax of Moscow Province is handled normally without "breaks" or "mobilizations." But the active will of the worker-citizens, functioning through a score of organizations, has turned since then to a hundred other emergencies.

In my twelve years in the Soviet Union I have often been irritated and appalled by aspects of its daily struggle, its petty censorship and inefficiencies, the cost in human suffering of all essential progress. There are stupidities and violences in plenty, yes-men and careerists, hardship, injustice, wastage of youth and life. What makes them endurable is just this fact that they are caused not by behest of any one man or even of three million, but are part of the slow process (history will not call it slow) whereby the tens of millions across one-sixth of earth's surface create self-discipline, self-rule. Chief of the joys of life in the Soviet Union is to meet, in far-flung factories and farms, those ever-increasing men and women, able and tireless, who function after the manner of Stalin, drawing out and combining the masses around them, creators of collective will.

Thus will they carry on, they feel quite confident, initiating, organizing and forming new routine of habit, testing those habits and making them over again till the practice of collective thought and action is so widespread that there is no need of a state. In these past twelve years I have seen the forms of the state changed often, administrative districts expanded, contracted, new government departments added, combined or abolished, new functions given to the state or taken away and given to trade unions and cooperatives. The state today, in most of our common thought, is chiefly Foreign Office diplomacy, and the Red Army, both of which have the task of protecting our peace to build. In internal affairs, the state makes workers' rule secure against class enemies. It represents the concentration of our finance, the correlation of our industry, farming and transport, but even in these one hears less of the state than of the "line of the Party," which plans beyond the state. Till socialist revolutions in other lands and the cultural growth of humanity make not only the state but all political guidance no more needed, men of the forge and foundry, the farms and laboratories, cooperating through technical, social, and economic relations, go forward with science to man's domination of the world.

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